

# Silesian language

**Silesian** or **Upper Silesian** (Silesian: *ślōnskŏ gŏdka* / *ślůnsko godka* [ˈɕlɔnskɔ ˈɡɔtkɐ]; Czech: *slezština*; Polish: *gwara śląska*, *język śląski*, *etnolekt śląski*; German: *Schlonsakisch*, *Wasserpölnisch* (*pej.*)) is a West Slavic lect of the Lechitic group,<sup>[2]</sup> spoken in Upper Silesia and partly in Czech Silesia. Its vocabulary has been significantly influenced by Central German due to the existence of numerous Silesian German speakers in the area prior to World War II and after.<sup>[5]</sup>

Some regard it as one of the four major dialects of Polish,<sup>[6][7][8][9]</sup> while others classify it as a separate language, distinct from Polish.<sup>[10][11][12][13][14]</sup>

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## Distribution

Silesian speakers currently live in the region of Upper Silesia, which is split between southwestern Poland and the northeastern Czech Republic. At present Silesian is commonly spoken in the area between the historical border of Silesia on the east and a line from Syców to Prudnik on the west as well as in the Rawicz area. Until 1945 Silesian was also spoken in enclaves in Lower Silesia.

Silesian	
Upper Silesian	
<i>ślōnskŏ gŏdka</i> <div><i>ślůnsko godka</i></div>	
Pronunciation	<span>[ˈɕlɔnskɔ ˈɡɔtkɐ]</span>
Native to	Poland (Silesian Voivodeship, Opole Voivodeship), Czech Republic (Moravia–Silesia, Jeseník)
Region	Upper Silesia / Silesia
Ethnicity	Silesians
Native speakers	510,000 (2011 census) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	<div>Indo-European <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li> Balto-Slavic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Slavic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>West Slavic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Lechitic<sup>[2]</sup><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Silesian</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Writing system	Latin script (Silesian alphabet) <sup>[3]</sup>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	szl
Glottolog	sile1253 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/sile1253</span> ) <sup>[4]</sup>
Linguasphere	53-AAA-cck, 53-AAA-dam

Lower Silesian, a variety of Central German, was spoken by the ethnic German majority population of that region. The German speaking populace was either evacuated en masse by German forces towards the end of the war or deported by the new administration upon the Polish annexation of Silesia after World War II. Before the war, most Slavic speakers also spoke German and, at least in eastern Upper Silesia, many German-speakers were acquainted with Slavic Silesian.

According to the last official census in Poland in 2011, about 509,000<sup>[1]</sup> people declared Silesian as their native language (in census 2002, about 60,000<sup>[15]</sup>), and in the censuses in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia, nearly 0.9 million people declared Silesian nationality.<sup>[1][16][17][18]</sup>

## Grammar

Although the morphological differences between Silesian and Polish have been researched extensively, other grammatical differences have not been studied in depth.

Another major difference is in question-forming. In Polish, questions which do not contain interrogative words are formed either by using intonation or the interrogative particle *czy*. In Silesian, questions which do not contain interrogative words are formed by using intonation (with a markedly different intonation pattern than in Polish) or inversion (e.g. *Je to na mapie?*); there is no interrogative particle.

## Example

According to Jan Miodek, standard Polish has always been used by Upper Silesians as a language of prayers.<sup>[19]</sup> The Lord's Prayer in Silesian, Polish, Czech, and English.



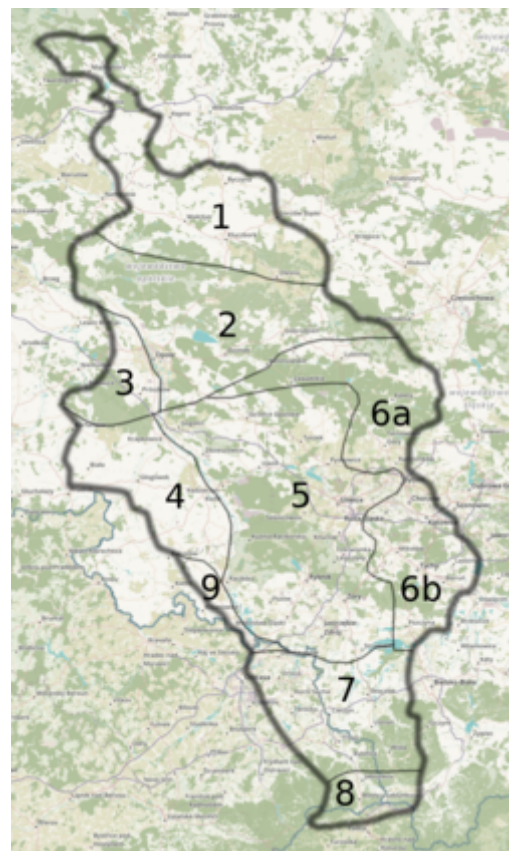
Range of Silesian on a map of East-Central Europe (marked as **G1** and **G2**, in southern Poland and the eastern Czech Republic).

Silesian (Steuer spelling)	Polish	Czech	English
<p>Uojcze nasz, kery jeżeś we ńebje, bydź pośwjyncůne mjano Twoje. Przińdź krůlestwo Twoje, bydź wola Twoja, jako we ńebje, tak tyż na żymji. Chlyb nasz koždodżynny dej nům dżisej.</p> <p>A uodpuść nům nasze winy, jako a my uodpuszczůmy naszym wińńikům. A ńy wůdź nos na pokuszyńy, nale zbow nos uode złygo. Amyn.</p>	<p>Ojciec nasz, któryś jest w niebie, świeć się imię Twoje, przyjdź królestwo Twoje, bądź wola Twoja jako w niebie tak i na ziemi. Chleba naszego powszedniego daj nam dzisiaj.</p> <p>I odpuść nam nasze winy, jako i my odpuszczamy naszym winowajcom. I nie wódź nas na pokuszenie, ale nas zbaw ode złego. Amen.</p>	<p>Otče náš, jenž jsi na nebesích, posvět' se jméno Tvé Přijď království Tvé. Buď vůle Tvá, jako v nebi, tak i na zemi. Chléb náš vezdejší dej nám dnes</p> <p>A odpusť nám naše viny, jako i my odpouštíme našim viníkům a neuveď nás v pokušení, ale zbav nás od zlého. Amen.</p>	<p>Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.</p>

## Dialects of Silesian

Silesian has many dialects:

- Dialects spoken in areas which are now part of Poland, former Prussian Silesia:
  - Kluczbork Silesian dialect (1)
  - Opole Silesian dialect (2)
  - Niemodlin Silesian dialect (3)
  - Prudnik Silesian dialect (4)
  - Gliwice Silesian dialect (5)
  - Sulkovian Silesian dialect
  - Borderland Silesian-Lesser Polish dialect (6a & 6b)
  - Borderland Silesian-Lach dialect (9)
- Dialects spoken on both sides of the Czech–Polish border, former Austrian Silesia:
  - Cieszyn Silesian dialect (7)
  - Jabłonków Silesian dialect (8)
- Lach dialects spoken in areas which are now part of the Czech Republic, often considered linguistically apart from the ones mentioned above:
  - Opava subdialect
  - Ostrava subdialect
  - Frenštát subdialect



Map showing the distribution of the Silesian dialects

# Dialect vs. language

## Politicization

Opinions are divided among linguists regarding whether Silesian is a distinct language, a dialect of Polish, or in the case of Lach, a variety of Czech. The issue can be contentious, because some Silesians consider themselves to be a distinct nationality within Poland. When Czechs, Poles, and Germans each made claims to substantial parts of Silesia as constituting an integral part of their respective nation-states in the 19th and 20th centuries, the language of Slavic speaking Silesians became politicized.

Some, like Óndra Łysohorsky, a poet and author in the Czechoslovakia, saw the Silesians as being their own distinct people, which culminated in his effort to create a literary standard he called the "Lachian language". Silesian inhabitants supporting the cause of each of these ethnic groups had their own robust network of supporters across Silesia's political borders which shifted over the course of the 20th century prior to the large-scale ethnic cleansing in the aftermath of World War II.

## Views

Some linguists from Poland such as Jolanta Tambor,<sup>[20]</sup> Juan Lajo,<sup>[21]</sup> Dr Tomasz Wicherkiewicz<sup>[22]</sup> and philosopher Dr hab Jerzy Dadaczyński,<sup>[23]</sup> sociologist Dr Elżbieta Anna Sekuła<sup>[24]</sup> and sociolinguist Tomasz Kamusella<sup>[25][26]</sup> support its status as a language. According to Stanisław Rospond, it is impossible to classify Silesian as a dialect of the contemporary Polish language because he considers it to be descended from the Old Polish language.<sup>[27]</sup> Other Polish linguists, such as Jan Miodek and Edward Polański, do not support its status as a language. Jan Miodek and Dorota Simonides, both of Silesian origin, prefer conservation of the entire range of Silesian dialects rather than standardization.<sup>[28]</sup> The German linguist Reinhold Olesch was eagerly interested in the "Polish vernaculars" of Upper Silesia and other Slavic varieties such as Kashubian and Polabian.<sup>[29][30][31][32]</sup>

United States Immigration Commission in 1911 classified it as one of the dialects of Polish.<sup>[33][34]</sup>

Most linguists writing in English, such as Alexander M. Schenker,<sup>[35]</sup> Robert A. Rothstein,<sup>[36]</sup> and Roland Sussex and Paul Cubberley<sup>[37]</sup> in their respective surveys of Slavic languages, list Silesian as a dialect of Polish, as does Encyclopædia Britannica.<sup>[38]</sup>

Gerd Hentschel wrote as a result of his paper about the question whether Silesian is a new Slavic language, that "Silesian ... can thus ... without doubt be described as a dialect of Polish" ("*Das Schlesische ... kann somit ... ohne Zweifel als Dialekt des Polnischen beschrieben werden*").<sup>[39][40][41]</sup>

In Czechia, disagreement exists concerning the Lach dialects which rose to prominence thanks to Óndra Łysohorsky and his translator Ewald Osers.<sup>[42]</sup> While some have considered it a separate language, most now view Lach as a dialect of Czech.<sup>[43][44][45]</sup>



Grave inscription at Lutheran cemetery in Střítěž near Český Těšín. The inscription, which says "Rest in Peace", is in the Cieszyn Silesian dialect.



Goral Silesian lect and Czech in Cieszyn, Poland. The text notifies that people under the age of 18 will not be served alcohol.

# Writing system

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There have been a number of attempts at codifying the language spoken by Slavophones in Silesia. Probably the most well-known was undertaken by Óndra Łysohorsky when codifying the Lachian dialects in creating the Lachian literary language in the early 20th century.

Ślabikōrzowy szrajbōnek is the relatively new alphabet created by the Pro Loquela Silesiana organization to reflect the sounds of all Silesian dialects. It was approved by Silesian organizations affiliated in Rada Górnośląska. Ubuntu translation is in this alphabet<sup>[46]</sup> as is the Silesian Wikipedia. It is used in a few books, including the Silesian alphabet book.<sup>[47]</sup>

Letters: A, Ā, B, C, Ć, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, Ł, M, N, Ń, O, Ŏ, Ô, Õ, P, R, S, Ś, T, U, W, Y, Z, Ż, Ž.<sup>[47]</sup>

One of the first alphabets created specifically for Silesian was *Steuer's Silesian alphabet*, created in the Interwar period and used by Feliks Steuer for his poems in Silesian. The alphabet consists of 30 graphemes and eight digraphs:

Letters: A, B, C, Ć, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, Ł, M, N, Ń, O, P, R, S, Ś, T, U, Ů, W, Y, Z, Ż, Ž  
Digraphs: Au, Ch, Cz, Dz, Dź, Dž, Rz, Sz

Based on the Steuer alphabet, in 2006 the *Phonetic Silesian Alphabet* was proposed:<sup>[48]</sup>

Letters: A B C Ć Č D E F G H I J K L M N Ń O P R Ř S Ś Š T U Ů W Y Z Ž Ž.

Silesian's phonetic alphabet replaces the digraphs with single letters (Sz with Š, etc.) and does not include the letter Ł, whose sound can be represented phonetically with U. It is therefore the alphabet that contains the fewest letters. Although it is the (phonetically) most logical and hence the most intuitive writing of Silesian, it did not become popular with Silesian organizations, with the argument that it contains too many caron diacritics and hence resembles the Czech alphabet. Large parts of the Silesian Wikipedia, however, are written in Silesian's phonetic alphabet.

Sometimes other alphabets are also used, such as the "Tadzikowy muster" (for the *National Dictation Contest of the Silesian language*) or the Polish alphabet, but writing in this alphabet is problematic as it does not allow for the differentiation and representation of all Silesian sounds.<sup>[47]</sup>

## Culture

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Silesian has recently seen an increased use in culture, for example:

- online news and information platform (founded in January 2018): Wachtyrz.eu.
- TV and radio stations (for example: TV Silesia, Sfera TV, TVP Katowice, Slonsky Radio,<sup>[49]</sup> Radio Piekary, Radio Silesia, Radio Fest);
- music groups (for example: Jan Skrzek, Krzysztof Hanke, Hasiok, Dohtor Miód, FEET);
- theatre<sup>[50]</sup> (for example: *Polterabend* in Silesian Theatre<sup>[51]</sup>);
- plays<sup>[52]</sup>
- film (for example: *Grzeszny żywot Franciszka Buły* ("The Sinful Life of Franciszek Buła"))
- books (for example, the so-called Silesian Bible; poetry: "Myśli ukryte" by Karol Gwóźdź)
- teaching aides (for example, a Silesian basal reader)<sup>[53]</sup>



# Recognition

In 2003, the National Publishing Company of Silesia (*Narodowa Oficyna Śląska*) commenced operations.<sup>[54]</sup> This publisher was founded by the Alliance of the People of the Silesian Nation (*Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej*) and it prints books about Silesia and books in Silesian language.

In July 2007, the Slavic Silesian language was given the ISO 639-3 code szl.<sup>[55]</sup>

On 6 September 2007, 23 politicians of the Polish parliament made a statement about a new law to give Silesian the official status of a regional language.<sup>[56]</sup>

The first official National Dictation Contest of the Silesian language (*Ogólnopolskie Dyktando Języka Śląskiego*) took place in August 2007. In dictation as many as 10 forms of writing systems and orthography have been accepted.<sup>[57][58]</sup>

On 30 January 2008 and in June 2008, two organizations promoting Silesian language were established: Pro Loquela Silesiana and *Tôwarzistwo Piastowaniô Ślónskij Môwy "Danga"*.<sup>[59]</sup>

On 26 May 2008, the Silesian Wikipedia was founded.<sup>[60]</sup>

On 30 June 2008 in the edifice of the Silesian Parliament in Katowice, a conference took place on the status of the Silesian language. This conference was a forum for politicians, linguists, representatives of interested organizations and persons who deal with the Silesian language. The conference was titled "Silesian – Still a Dialect or Already a Language?" (*Śląsko godka – jeszcze gwara czy jednak już język?*).<sup>[61]</sup>

In 2012, the Ministry of Administration and Digitization registered the Silesian language in Annex 1 to the Regulation on the state register of geographical names;<sup>[62]</sup> however, in a November 2013 amendment to the regulation, Silesian is not included.<sup>[63]</sup>



Bilingual sign in Katowice (Katowicy): Polish *Kwiaciarnia* ("florist") and Silesian *Blumy i Geszynki* ("flowers and gifts"). The latter also exemplifies the Germanisms in Silesian (cf. German *Blumen und Geschenke*).

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## See also

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- [List of Silesian-language books in standard orthography](#)
- [List of Silesian-language films](#)
- [Silesian German](#)
- [Texas Silesian](#)
- [Wymysorys language](#)
- [Masurian dialect](#)

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